

How to Make Cheese Sauce

When cooking with cheese, there are just a few important points to keep in mind:

The less you heat cheese, the better. When making soup, sauce, or fondue, add the cheese last; then heat it only long enough to melt. Don't let it boil or it will become tough and curdled. Often, you can remove the pan from the burner; the residual heat will melt the cheese.

Shred, crumble, or finely dice the cheese before heating to ensure quick, smooth melting. (Remember that it's much easier to shred or dice cheese when it's cold.)

Allow the shredded cheese to come to room temperature before adding it to a hot mixture.

Starch (such as all-purpose flour, cornstarch, or potato flour) will keep the cheese from curdling. If using all-purpose flour, add it to the mixture before the cheese; it needs to be cooked for a few minutes to remove the starchy taste.

Adding an acidic ingredient such as lemon juice will help prevent the cheese from becoming stringy. Simply sprinkle some lemon juice over the shredded cheese before heating it.

Reduced-fat cheeses have different melting characteristics than regular cheeses. They will take longer to melt and will be tougher. Be sure to shred reduced-fat cheese very finely, and allow it to melt over very low heat while stirring constantly.

To begin, make a roux:

Measure out equal amounts of butter and flour.

Dice the butter into small cubes and melt it in a saucepan over low heat.

Once the butter is melted, begin whisking in the flour.

When all the flour is incorporated, continue stirring and cooking for a few minutes to activate the starch granules.

If you're making a white or light-colored cheese sauce, keep the heat low enough so the roux does not brown.

Next comes the milk. If the roux is hot, the milk should be cool, but if the roux is cool, the milk should be hot. Combining the two ingredients at different temperatures ensures that they will heat up at a moderate rate--not too fast, and not too slow--creating a velvety-smooth sauce.

Whisk the mixture until smooth, then add seasonings if you wish.

Allow the sauce to simmer until it has lost its "floury" taste (about 20 minutes), then strain out any seasonings.

Remove the pan from the heat and gently blend in the cheese. If the cheese doesn't seem to be melting, return the pan to very low heat, but watch it carefully and remove as soon as the cheese is melted.

Once you've mastered the basics, you can create an endless variety of cheese sauces by varying the kind of cheese you use, mixing in different herbs, spices, and veggies, and using whole milk to alter the level of richness in the sauce.

Source: www.allrecipes.com